

Governor's 2017 Agricultural and Urban Conservation Award winners honored

*Delaware Association of Conservation Districts also honors
Legislator of the Year*

DOVER – The Delaware Agricultural Museum and Village was the setting for today's annual Governor's Agricultural and Urban Conservation Awards. Governor John Carney, along with DNREC Secretary Shawn M. Garvin, Delaware Association of Conservation Districts President Robert Emerson and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service State Conservationist Kasey Taylor, led a ceremony recognizing this year's honorees and signed a proclamation officially designating April 30-May 7 as Soil and Water Stewardship Week in Delaware under the theme, "Healthy Soils Are Full of Life."



Governor Carney and national conservation poster contest winner Eason Li, of Newark.

"Today's honorees have demonstrated their ongoing commitment to improving the environment, and on behalf of the people of Delaware, I would like to thank each of them for their dedication and for their time, effort, and investment to implement model conservation practices," said Governor Carney. "I also want to thank all of the Conservation District supervisors and employees for the many and various contributions they make to improve the quality of life in Delaware."

"Much of the work we do at DNREC is accomplished through partnerships with USDA-NRCS and Delaware's three conservation

districts, and these awards highlight the beneficial outcomes of these relationships,” said Secretary Garvin. “This year’s honorees are wonderful and diverse examples of how we can learn from the success of others and can all be better environmental stewards by taking thoughtful and important actions to protect and enhance our water and air quality.”

Conservation Award Winners

New Castle County

- **Agricultural: John R. Stinson & Sons Inc., Hockessin**

In operation since 1959 and the last of Delaware’s original mushroom producers, the John R. Stinson & Sons farm is managed and operated by Randy Stinson, with his two brothers and Randy’s son, Brent. Stinson & Sons worked with the New Castle Conservation District and USDA-NRCS to design and install a 257,000-gallon rinse water storage tank and a high-capacity pump and tank aeration system. The new system captures and recycles water for preparing mushroom compost, providing additional water quality protection to the headwaters of Mill Creek.

- **Urban: Dragon Run Tide Gate Repair, Delaware City**

Thirty years after the need to overhaul the Dragon Run tide gate was first reported, with the help of Senator Nicole Poore and Representative Valerie Longhurst, Delaware City obtained \$500,000 to fund the project. From a partnership of the New Castle Conservation District, the Delaware City Refinery, Pennoni Consulting engineers and contractor Merit Construction Engineers, the project replaced the old 36-inch diameter tide gate with three 48-inch tide gates to provide enhanced tidal flood protection to the northeast section of Delaware City.

Kent County

- **Agricultural: Robbins Farms, Milford**

Founded in 1895 by Arthur David Robbins with only 10 cows, Robbins Farms is currently operated by Arthur's great-grandson Ronnie Robbins and his son Artie Robbins. Recognized as a Delaware Century Farm in 1995, the operation currently milks 250-300 cows for Land O'Lakes. Added in 1975, its poultry operation consists of six poultry houses, growing roasters for Mountaire Farms at a rate of 146,000 birds per flock, 4.5 flocks per year. Robbins Farms also manages 600 acres of cropland for hay, silage and corn. Working with Kent Conservation District and USDA-NRCS, the farm implemented nutrient management plans and practices including two manure storage structures, a cattle walkway, a single-channel composter, heavy-use area protection areas and a poultry manure spreader.

- **Urban Conservation Award: DE Turf, Frederica**

Designed by local firm Becker Morgan Group and managed by DE Turf, the Kent County Regional Sports Complex uses synthetic turf to hold and infiltrate stormwater runoff from all of its playing fields, with additional infiltration basins handling stormwater runoff from parking areas. The synthetic turf fields also eliminate fertilizer and pesticide used on traditional athletic fields. The design promotes groundwater recharge and protects the water quality of the nearby Murderkill River. Other partners on the project include Kent County Levy Court and the Greater Kent Committee.

Sussex County

- **Agricultural Conservation Award: James H. Baxter IV, Baxter Farms Inc., Georgetown**

Baxter Farms owner James H. "Jay" Baxter IV is a fourth-generation farmer, working the family farm beside his

93-year-old grandfather, grandmother and sister. Baxter Farms includes 2,000+ acres of corn, soybeans, wheat, sweet corn and lima beans, a 200,000-broiler chicken operation and a Certified Tree Farm. A strong supporter of soil health, Jay participates in the District's cover crop programs, growing cover crops on about 50 percent of his land. Last year, Jay worked with NRCS and the Districts in creating soil health videos to promote conservation planning, soil health practices and the importance of being good stewards of the land for future generations. Without financial assistance, he also constructed a manure structure and composter and vegetative buffers around all farm ditches.

▪ **Urban Conservation Award: Delaware Botanic Gardens at Pepper Creek, Dagsboro**

The 37-acre Delaware Botanic Garden, which began construction this spring on a 10-year multiphase plan, will include gardens, trails, habitats and outdoor classrooms that emphasize environmental stewardship, enhance awareness and educate residents and visitors about the natural wonders of Sussex County. Support from the Sussex County Land Trust gave the project its unique location, allowing the creation of various habitats, including 12 acres of hardwood forests and upland landscapes as well as wetlands along the tidal creek.

Delaware Association of Conservation Districts' Legislator of the Year

The Delaware Association of Conservation Districts (DACD) also recognized State Senator David G. Lawson, 15th District, as the 2016 Legislator of the Year, an annual award given for outstanding service, loyalty and devotion to conservation efforts in Delaware. After moving to Delaware in 1969 and serving a tour of duty in Vietnam, Senator Lawson served four years as a Milford police officer and 1973-1992 with the Delaware State Police. He later opened Shooter's Choice, an

indoor shooting range in Cheswold, which he sold in 2012. He was elected to the Delaware State Senate in 2010 and currently serves as a member of the Senate Finance, Judicial and Community Affairs, Transportation, Veterans Affairs and Joint Finance Committees. Senator Lawson also has worked closely with Kent Conservation District on tax ditches, drainage assistance and stormwater management.

First place winner of National Conservation Poster Contest

Also receiving special recognition at the awards ceremony was Eason Li, a 6th grader from Newark who attends The Independence School. Eason was Delaware's state-level winner in the Delaware Association of Conservation Districts' annual conservation poster contest, qualifying his creative and informational poster for entry representing Delaware in the National Association of Conservation Districts' (NACD) conservation poster contest, themed "We All Need Trees." His poster, which was displayed with other national winners at the NACD's annual meeting in Denver, Colo., was framed and presented to him today, along with a check for \$200 from the NACD Ladies Auxiliary, which sponsors the poster contest.

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